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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 006540

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PACOM FOR FPA HUSO
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: DAS JOHN DISCUSSION WITH ACTIVIST KRAISAK
CHOONHAVAN

REF: A. BANGKOK 6478

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5711

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: DAS John met with former Senator Kraissak Choonhavan to discuss the Thai political situation. Kraissak was glad that former PM Thaksin had been removed, but disappointed in the coup makers. He was particularly critical of the lack of progress in the corruption investigations. He questioned whether the coup leaders might be prepared to make a deal with Thaksin, and was concerned that some of them might harbor their own political aspirations. Kraissak believed that the government should lift martial law, but also warned that Thaksin "had thugs everywhere" and was determined to come back. Kraissak also expressed concern about the situation in the South, where the absence of justice continued to cause anger among the local population. Kraissak's concerns are being echoed by a variety of sources around Bangkok, and appear to be part of a trend, as some of the "Bangkok elite" grow increasingly disillusioned with the coup. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) DAS Eric John met on October 26 with former Senator Kraissak Choonhavan, a long-time critic of former PM Thaksin. Kraissak set out serious problems facing the interim government and the coup council. Kraissak complained that the authorities were not moving fast enough to freeze Thaksin's assets and dismantle his power structure, including Thai Rak Thai (TRT). Kraissak complained that the initial Assets Examination Commission was set up immediately after the coup with "six people known to be corrupt and incompetent." Kraissak met with the Council for National Security (CNS) and advised them on better choices, including former Senators who had spent years investigating Thaksin administration corruption. (Note, The CNS revamped the commission on September 30 along the lines of Kraissak's recommendation. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) DAS John underscored the concerns in Washington about the coup and the timetable for returning to democratic rule. He noted in particular concerns we would have if there were unfair prosecutions. He warned that, if the government tried Thaksin while martial law was still in effect, it might look

like a "kangaroo court." Ambassador Boyce noted that, at the same time, the government was under significant pressure to proceed with prosecutions. Kraissak said that the government would not use a "kangaroo court." They are being careful about how they proceed, "too careful, in my opinion." They understand that "international capital" is involved. In any case, the Asset Examination Commission would have to take whatever case they make to a court for trial.

14. (C) Kraissak turned to complain more generally about the slow pace of dismantling Thai Rak Thai. He raised the concern that some in the CNS and government were deliberately going easy on TRT, perhaps because they hoped to make some kind of deal with Thaksin. In particular, he feared that some might be willing to help Thaksin preserve his wealth in exchange for an agreement to stay out of politics himself, but provide covert financial support for a new political party. "I am extremely concerned about their motivations," he said. He hinted darkly that CNS Secretary General Winai might have political aspirations, and pointed out that Winai was close to Pinij Jarusombat, former TRT health minister. Pinij was expected to form a new political party together with one of the largest TRT factions, based in TRT's northeastern stronghold, which included over 100 MPs. (Comment: We don't find the accusation against Gen. Winai very credible, but note that similar concerns are beginning to turn up in the Thai media. A spokesman for the Peoples Alliance for Democracy (PAD) made a similar accusation about Gen. Winai to the press, and other writers have speculated that "traitors within the CNS" are responsible for the lack of progress on assets seizure. End comment.) Kraissak warned that, "If the coupmakers have political ambitions," there will be problems. "Those who opposed Thaksin from the beginning won't be happy."

BANGKOK 00006540 002 OF 002

15. (C) Kraissak said that there were divisions within the interim leadership. Some of the military faction did not like the election of controversial jurist Meechai Ruchupan as head of the National Legislative Assembly (ref A). Some are unhappy because they did not get enough of their people into the Cabinet and National Legislative Assembly. At the same time, there was concern that some of the new cabinet members were too close to Thaksin. (Kraissak cited the new Interior Minister as one example.) Kraissak gave PM Surayud a mixed review. "He's not power hungry," Kraissak said, but he lacks the experience to be a good PM. He thinks he has the answer to everything, but he simplifies things too much, according to Kraissak.

16. (C) Kraissak believed that the CNS was being too cautious about lifting martial law. He did not believe that there was a threat that justified this decision. However, he acknowledged that Thaksin "has thugs everywhere" and cited the school burnings in several districts as evidence of this. "Thaksin plays hard ball. He's serious about coming back," Kraissak said. He agreed that this was the real fear leading the government to maintain martial law. Regarding Thaksin's own plans on September 19, Kraissak believed that Thaksin was planning to declare a state of emergency shortly after his return from the UN. Thaksin would have based this on the car bomb case (ref B), which would have been blamed on several generals in the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), giving him an excuse to dismiss Gen. Sonthi as Army Commander in Chief and then declare the emergency. Kraissak said, "The coup solved one problem, but created more." Asked what the government/CNS could do now to correct their initial mistakes, Kraissak shrugged his shoulders, "It's too late."

17. (C) Kraissak also raised concerns about the situation in the South. He underscored the importance of accountability and giving the people due process. He raised the case of a Muslim teacher who had been shot in the head and seriously injured. Kraissak had some evidence that the attack was committed by a soldier who had apparently been hired by drug

dealers. The military had advised Kraisaak to take his evidence to the police, rather than dealing with it themselves. Kraisaak pointed out that the track record for resolving such cases was very poor, and this left many people in the South angry.

COMMENT

18. (C) Kraisaak is one of the anti-Thaksin activists who at least accepted the coup when it happened, but are unhappy with the way things have developed since. Although Kraisaak's name was mentioned as a potential foreign minister, he has wound up without any position, and there may be a whiff of sour grapes about some of his complaints. He is, however, a sharp observer and may be a bellwether for the shift of "elite Bangkok" opinion; they are palpably less enthusiastic about the coup now than they were a month ago, and are looking for explanations about why things have not gone as expected. Kraisaak has earned a deserved reputation as an advocate for human rights, so it worth noting that his strongest criticism was that the corruption investigations were going too slowly and cautiously, also reflecting a widely-held view.

19. (U) DAS John did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.
BOYCE